

# FIVE COMETS HEAVE HOWA VICINITY OF THE EARTH

Five of the Celestial Terrors of Human Race to Appear During the Year 1913—As in the Past, Their Appearance Is Cause of Dread.

By WILLIAM L. ALDORFER.

Suppose a ball of iron 50 miles in diameter, weighing millions and millions of tons, falling at the rate of 500 miles a minute, were to strike the earth, what would happen? The answer to such an appalling catastrophe I shall leave to your imagination. That is the weight and mass of the ordinary comet, as judged by the S. S. Hale, astronomer, and the question is suggested, because during the year 1913 many comets are expected to visit the vicinity of this mundane sphere. The number 12 is a hoodoo number, and many are the superstitions connected with it, so it would not be surprising if the year 1913 should bring in its train many disasters and thereby live up to its unholy reputation of the past.

So long as the memory of man goes back, the appearance of a comet has always been taken as a cause for dread in the train of comets. It has ever been held, come wars, bloodshed, fires, floods, plagues, famine, and all the other calamities possible to the human race. Sylvester, the noted poet of olden time, says:

"That too terrible gaze  
Even right by night on that wondrous hair,  
That hair come, that long, streaming star,  
Which threaten earth with famine, plague, and war."

For ages the appearance of a comet has been the cause of much fear and intense interest among the inhabitants of Mother Earth. And even today, after centuries of study of that celestial phenomenon, most people have a superstitious dread of impending calamity when they hear that certain comets are about to approach the earth. In the old days even scientists shared this superstition, but today the science of astronomy has progressed so far that the men who follow this science laugh at such fear. They reason upon the basis of cold facts upon which intuition and superstition have no bearing.

There are five periodic comets due to return during the year 1913. They are named after the men who discovered them—Holmes, Finlay, De Vries, Swift, Encke's comet, and Westphalia comet. Holmes' comet, the first expected to appear during the year, has a very interesting history. It is remarkable because the last time it was seen in 1832, it burst into a sudden fireball, that astronomers say it must have been one of the great stars of the heavens suddenly thrown out of its orbit by some powerful unknown force, and taking fire, took up its endless course through space as a comet.

Why Stars Leave Their Orbits.

The peculiar phenomenon is explained in this way: Many stars have a fixed orbit, the same as the earth, but sometimes a tremendous upheaval occurs sufficient to throw the star from its orbit. It is then cast into space, and, depending upon the force of the upheaval, it may travel through the heavens, an immense ball of fire traveling at such terrific velocity that it finally burns up and disappears altogether. That is what might happen to the earth were a disturbance to take place in its immediate vicinity sufficient to throw it off its orbit. The earth would immediately become a comet and travel through space until it is consumed by fire or falls into the sun.

The next comet to appear will be Finlay's. This comet was first discovered in 1826 and again seen in 1892. At the last return it passed within the time when a comet approaches nearest the sun on September 8, both Holmes' and Finlay's comets have a period of about seven years. Next in order will appear the De Vries comet. Sometime about the middle of April Encke's comet will be visible. This comet also has an interesting history. Scientists say it is a bit changed and that this change was brought about by a resisting medium somewhere in space; that is, there is some attraction sufficiently great to change its course, and eventually the comet will be drawn closer and closer to the sun until it finally drops into that body and disappears. The most interesting wanderer of the heavens to appear during the year, however, will be Westphalia's comet, last seen about sixty years ago, in 1842. Astronomers all over the world will be on the lookout for this great comet.

There are all the periodic comets expected during 1913. As distinguished from the periodic comets are the ordinary comets which move in a parabola—that is, a curve above the heavens.

and never return. The greater number of shooting phenomena seen are of this latter class. One of the highest authorities on astronomy is Prof. Asaph Hall, of the U. S. Naval Observatory, who has raised in the atmosphere of astronomy. His father, Prof. Asaph Hall, occupied the same position with Uncle Sam that his son now holds. In his earliest boyhood young Hall became an earnest student of the science of astronomy. He is now fifty-three years old, and for the past forty years has studied the science, and is today ranked as one of the leading astronomers of the world. He explains a comet in this way:

Mr. Hall's Explanation.

"You know all space is full of a nebulous material, probably the same material that the earth and sun is made of, only much finer. It is an assemblage of millions of small particles. There are uncountable numbers of these particles floating in space, and when the sun gets anywhere near them so that its attraction becomes powerful enough to pull it into the solar system, we get the comet. The sun's attraction not only pulls it into the solar system, but also lights it up when it becomes visible to the people on the earth."

"Now, to go farther. Many of these particles also become periodic comets in another way. They probably enter the solar system as unknown wanderers. They enter the neighborhood of one of the large planets when the velocity at which it is traveling becomes greatly changed by the attraction or repelling power of the planet and is decreased. This attraction of the planet holds the comet in a certain position and it will then strike around that planet in an elliptical orbit. In other words, it is very similar to a ball attached to the end of a string and whirled around the finger. The string takes the place of the attraction of the planet, while the ball is the comet. As the string is held in the hand, the comet is held in the end of the string."

"Another interesting thing in connection with this phenomenon is the family of comets. It is certain that many comets cannot well originate within the limits of our solar system, but must have come from a great distance. They come within the attraction of certain planets, like Jupiter, for instance, and the attraction of this planet holds them in the way I have already told you about. The short period comets, those which have periods ranging from three to six years, are now recognized and designated as Jupiter's family of comets. About thirty of these are known already, of which fifteen have been seen twice or oftener—some of them as many as six times. Some have been seen only once. One of these is Tempel's comet, which is closely connected with the November meteor. And, finally, Neptune has a family of six, among which is the great comet of Halley's comet, and two others which have returned twice since 1698."

"Shooting stars are another unusually interesting phenomenon of the heavens. They originate from comets. As I have said, comets are made of dust and gas, and when they become heated up and burst into flames, and separate into millions of parts, thus forming a shower of shooting stars. There is apparently some electrical action going on between the sun and a comet, so that a comet's nucleus partly by reflected sunlight and partly by the heat of the sun, is heated and the gas is driven off. As a comet approaches the sun, the gas is driven off in great quantities, and the comet is surrounded by a great cloud of gas, which is called the comet's atmosphere. This atmosphere is so dense that it is visible to the naked eye, and it is this atmosphere that is seen as a shooting star when it enters the earth's atmosphere and burns up."

The Source of Meteors.

Then we have what is known as a meteor. When a comet crosses the orbit of the earth some of its parts are caught in the atmosphere of the earth. The atmosphere burns them up or turns them into a shower of shooting stars, or into the form of heavy pieces of iron or stone. Some of them have been known to penetrate the crust of the earth thousands of feet on account of the terrific velocity at which they were traveling when they struck the ground. At certain times of the year showers of stars appear in the heavens. These probably come about through the flocks of comets, or their parts, as they pass, spreading out all the way round the earth's orbit, and every year when the earth spins around to that particular spot again the particles come within the attraction of our atmosphere and become shooting stars or meteors.

## STUDENT OF THE HEAVENS.



PROF. ASAPH HALL.

One of highest authorities on astronomy, from the Naval Observatory.

attraction of our atmosphere and become shooting stars or meteors. Some of them drop upon the earth, while others continue on through space, until the end of time.

"In 1832 a comet was actually seen to burst into millions of parts by an astronomer who happened to be studying the heavens at the time with a comet-seeker. It was one of the most brilliant displays ever seen by human being. The entire heavens were lit up and for a time it appeared as though some planet was literally on fire. Afterward it was learned that it was only a comet which happened to get too near the sun and was burned up in the terrific heat of that body. This comet was known as Biela's comet. It was first seen at New Haven, Conn., in 1828, and exactly thirty-three years later, in 1861, appeared again. Just eighty years ago it began to break up and this process will continue for a long time. When the earth gets in a certain position every thirty-three years we see a shower from this same comet. Parts of this shower may appear a year before or a year after, but the principal shower or parts of the comet will be seen every thirty-three years until the whole comet is consumed. It was seen the last time in 1909."

"Among all the stars known in astronomy the periodically returning comet, now known as Halley's comet, is the principal, and has the most helpful record. In this comet's wake, after every one of its recorded appearances, there have always followed terrible disasters. Not only wars and battles, but other deeds of bloodshed, such as massacres and murders, but such of the dread disasters that are held to go with comets have followed alone, one after the other, in this comet's train. The record of great events connected with Halley's comet have been traced back nearly 2,000 years. So many appalling disasters have followed the appearance of this comet that it now has the distinction of being the bloodiest of all stars of ill-omen."

Halley's comet was noted in the summer of 1305, and continued in sight until the spring of the following year. It was discovered by Edmund Halley, an English astronomer of the old days. He was the first man to predict its return about seventy-six years afterward, in 1758. It appeared on schedule time, and again exactly seventy-six years later, in 1835. Its first appearance was described as "like that of a blazing rocket, the flame from which was driven aside as by a strong gale, or as the stream of fire from the discharge of a cannon, when the sparks and smoke is carried backward by the wind."

Plague Follows Halley's Comet.

Immediately after this comet appeared in 1305, in the old world, the bubonic plague broke out in a series of epidemics. In Egypt, in the city of Alexandria alone, 5,000 people died from this disease. All the Moslems attributed this calamity to the evil influence of the comet, which was in the sky at the time. In America, the plague broke out in the city of New York in 1800. It was then, on its approach to the sun, it was last seen and passed over the Southern Hemisphere. It was seen in the city of New York in 1800, and again exactly seventy-six years later, in 1835. Its first appearance was described as "like that of a blazing rocket, the flame from which was driven aside as by a strong gale, or as the stream of fire from the discharge of a cannon, when the sparks and smoke is carried backward by the wind."

that if they chose they likewise could tell of strange happenings. It is a satisfaction to have day-light and public testimony to help in forming a judgment. Happily, this is not another lack in the case of the ghosts of Statuary Hall. The guide of the Capitol has called the attention of wondering visitors to the strange echoes and other acoustic phenomena of this remarkable room. There is something positively uncanny about them—for example, the distinct audibility of the lowest whisper uttered a long distance away, if speaker and listener respectively stand on certain marble blocks indicated to them.

Similar sounds of footsteps have been heard by members of the Capitol. Years ago a member of the watch, on duty at night, became convinced that some ghostly person was passing through the corridors, with the idea of capturing the supposed intruder. Time and again he got the footsteps cornered in a place where there was no possibility of escape, but invariably the person there in the building would be heard from another direction, and could never be overtaken.

There are, moreover, at least four well-authenticated stories that have been told in the Capitol. One of these is that of a tall military-looking gentleman, dressed in a frock coat, with a long mustache and coat, on many occasions he has been seen walking along the corridors beneath the House of Representatives. His hands clasped behind him, and with an aspect of extreme melancholy. Always pacing slowly, as if waiting for something, or somebody, he vanishes when approached, like a magic lantern picture.

Ghost Made No Difference.

But of what account is one ghost, more or less, in the President's Palace—as it was called in the early days of the republic? No man's ambition to occupy the White House is ever deterred by the "haunts" that infest it. The most familiar known and best authenticated of White House specters is that of Abraham Lincoln. So far as is known, he is never absent from the White House. He is seen walking about the upper floor of the mansion by Woodrow Wilson, the President, and by many other persons who have been in the White House.

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Of all places in Washington, however, the one most indubitably haunted is the Capitol. It is impossible to mistake the tall, awkward figure and shuffling gait. When he gets to the top, he looks around, smiles sadly, and disappears. One might imagine that he had been into a tomb.

In earlier years the attic was said to be haunted by President William Henry Harrison. He is said to have been seen in the attic of the Capitol, and his phantasmal activities is not easy to explain. The attic was then a lumber room, filled with old furniture, and other articles of no value. It was the place where the House of Representatives used to hold its sessions. It was there that John Quincy Adams died—his death was a mystery, and it was said that he was haunted by the phantasmal activities of the House of Representatives.

Saw Entire House.

There was a member of the Capitol police, not long ago, who made formal affidavit that during Statuary Hall one night he beheld there the entire House of Representatives of 1848, assembled as if for law-making purposes—a phantasmal assembly, including Mr. Adams himself, and many other persons familiarly known in history, but long dead. All of them, to a man, turned and looked at him as he came in—a mysterious and ghostly light illumined the scene, but not one of them said a word. The police officer was dismissed for drinking, and the charge may have been just, but there are other witnesses at the Capitol who shake their heads solemnly when the matter is mentioned, and say

## TRACING THE COMETS.



LARGE TELESCOPE AT OBSERVATORY.

Here Prof. Hall spends many hours discovering phenomena of skies.

ness section of that city. All the comets that have been seen since the beginning of the world have been discovered at this observatory. It is a place of great interest to all who are interested in the heavens.

Down in Florida, at the same time, the Seminoles Indians went on the war path. The Indians called the comet "Big Knife" in the Seminole language. The war began with a massacre of American soldiers at Fort Clinch. All were slaughtered. Within forty-eight hours came another Indian fight on the banks of the Big Withlacoochee.

With the passing of the comet to the Southern Hemisphere, war broke out on another front in Mexico, Cuba, Central America, in Ecuador, Bolivia, Peru, and Argentina. At the same time Texas declared its independence and declared war upon Mexico. Next came the massacre

of the Alamo, when all of Jim Bowie's and David Crockett's American followers were killed, and out of 300 Americans very many fell at his post. One month later came the final disappearance of the comet. The Texas war came to an end.

When the comet had passed to the Southern Hemisphere, it was seen at the brightest in South Africa, and the Boers of Cape Colony understood it to be a sign from heaven, and forthwith set out on their great trek across the Orange and Vaal Rivers, where they found the Boers of the Orange Free State and the Transvaal Republic. Thus the comet was the signal for the first blood drawn in the long fight between the British and Boers.

In 1830 the comet became visible to the naked eye. It passed around the sun on March 12 of that year. After that it was seen throughout Europe during April and May, appearing at its brightest. The comet was seen at its brightest in Germany, where it was seen at its fiercest, the bloody seven years' war began between Frederick the Great and his enemies on all sides. The enormous comet had scattered the clouds from view when all Germany was overrun by marching armies from France, Austria, and from Russia. Although during this year a campaign of several hundred thousand soldiers was fought, it was the worst year of the seven years' war.

In 1890, when the comet appeared the last time, disaster followed, as usual, in its wake. One year after it was seen, was the outbreak of bubonic plague in China, India, and some parts of South America. Then followed the great Mississippi floods in 1912, which caused millions of dollars of damage and several loss of human life. Immediately following this came the Paris floods, the war in Mexico, and the war in the Balkans, which threatened at one time to involve all Europe in a frightful massacre. These peculiar coincidences could be multiplied many times, but for the sake of brevity it will suffice to say the comet maintained its ominous reputation, as most people will remember.

The comet which put Halley on the right track can be traced back to B. C. 11. In that year it was described as "a comet which hung suspended over the city of Rome, just before the death of Augustus, who ruled over the Roman Empire during the absence of Augustus in Greece and Asia."

Early Records of Chinese.

The Chinese have recorded two comets, one in C. and the other in B. C. This was the comet which St. Peter and Joseph saw over the city of Jerusalem before the fall of the holy city. In 141 the

Wars, Plagues, Fires, and Famines Usually Follow in the Wake of Sky Drelights. Many Theories of Shooting Stars and Comets Exploded.

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weight upon her pet cat, which was at her skirts. It uttered a yell, and she fell down the stairs. When she was picked up it was found that her neck was broken.

Another old-time Washington residence was that of the Meade family, and something of the supernatural was supposed to be connected with it for no other reason than that a likeness of the dead and ghostly Mrs. Meade was said to be distinguished in a pane of one of the front windows. It was clearly the figure of an old lady, and the more remarkable because this was the very window at which Mrs. Meade played on the piano at every day during many years. Such images in windows, however, have been occasionally observed elsewhere, and the explanation of them seems to be that the mind, when in a peculiar state, creates a substance, which are sensitive to light, and thus a permanent impression may conceivably be made on a window-pane by a person sitting near it for a long period of time in one attitude.

Ghost in Theater.

The New National Theater in Washington has a well-authenticated ghost—that of John McCullough, who made his first appearance there September 1, 1873. It is said to have been his favorite playhouse. He was greatly admired in Washington, and his last appearance on the same stage was in 1881, when, in the days of his wonderful powers, he did not long after from paralysis—he presented a pitiful spectacle, in the role of Virginius.

Old employees of the theater declare that in later years they have seen his ghost again and again, costumed as Virginius, in favor of the Meade family, and something of the supernatural was supposed to be connected with it for no other reason than that a likeness of the dead and ghostly Mrs. Meade was said to be distinguished in a pane of one of the front windows. It was clearly the figure of an old lady, and the more remarkable because this was the very window at which Mrs. Meade played on the piano at every day during many years. Such images in windows, however, have been occasionally observed elsewhere, and the explanation of them seems to be that the mind, when in a peculiar state, creates a substance, which are sensitive to light, and thus a permanent impression may conceivably be made on a window-pane by a person sitting near it for a long period of time in one attitude.

Uncle Sam's Seal.

Mr. Gaillard Hunt Tells About the Reverse Side of the "Great Seal," and Explains Why It Is Not Seen.

States. When his article was finished people who read it knew a whole lot more about the seal than any one had before. He found all kinds of interesting little sidelights on it, and put them into his article.

Among them, for instance, is the fact that the bald-headed eagle, with the "E Pluribus Unum" in its beak is only a part of our seal. There is also a reverse side that nobody knows much about that is just as important and official as the side with the eagle on it.

On this reverse side is a picture of a pyramid-shaped pile of masonry terminating in a steep-looking eye gazing out through a mass of sun rays. Above the eye in a field of azure intended to represent a blue sky are the words "Annuit Cœptis." Across the base of the pyramid is the date 1776 in Roman numerals. Beneath this is a scraggy-looking field, with bunches of grass growing in a discouraged sort of way. Over the field winds a golden scroll on which is the inscription "Novus Ordo Seclorum."

Mr. Hunt, when he started in to find out things about this part of the seal had to go way back, and dig up a lot of dusty archives. At last he found a letter written by Charles Thomson, who designed the seal, telling all about it. The letter said:

"The uncompleted pyramid signifies growing strength and duration. The eye over it and the motto allude to the signal interpositions of Providence in favor of the American cause. The date underneath is that of the Declaration of Independence, and the words under it signify the beginning of the new American era which commences from that date."

Mr. Hunt also found out why it is that the reverse side of the shield is so little known. It appears that immediately after Congress adopted it as the official seal an avalanche of adverse criticism began to pour in from artists and public men in the States.

The dismal-looking eye and field, in fact the whole design, they asserted, was "not like that of a great nation." So Congress, in its well-known manner, simply pigeonholed the reverse side of the shield, as it were, and by and by everybody forgot about it.

Chinese astronomers recorded a comet in March and April—the time computed for Halley's comet. The coming of the comet at this time was followed by a violent storm, the shock of which redoubled and the far East, which spread all over the known world. Again in 218 the Chinese record the appearance of the comet when the civil war broke out in China. In 255 the appearance of the comet there was followed by a rebellion of the ancient Britons against the Romans, and another rebellion against Rome by the Egyptians—the shock of which redoubled and the far East, which spread all over the known world. Again in 218 the Chinese record the appearance of the comet when the civil war broke out in China. In 255 the appearance of the comet there was followed by a rebellion of the ancient Britons against the Romans, and another rebellion against Rome by the Egyptians—the shock of which redoubled and the far East, which spread all over the known world. 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